REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN REYNOLDS 26th NOVEMBER

COUNTY STEPS UP CAMPAIGN FOR FAIRER FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS

A campaign to secure a fairer system of funding for Cambridgeshire's schools continues as the county's schools receive their draft budgets for 2013-14. As a result of national changes, some primary and secondary schools in the county will see significant reductions in their budgets compared with the previous year.

The main reason for the changes is that the Government is moving from a local formula for funding - developed with Cambridgeshire Schools Forum to reflect the circumstances of the county's schools - to a nationally prescribed formula with limited local flexibility. Other nationally enforced changes include a requirement for schools to contribute towards each statement of special educational needs, which will result in an additional commitment for a large number of schools when compared to the current system.

Cambridgeshire County Council has been supporting the county's schools in lobbying the Government for many years to secure a fairer system of funding for the county's schools, including sending a delegation of students and teachers to meet officials from the Department for Education.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds supported the letter to Education Secretary Michael Gove last month expressing 'severe concerns' about the likely impact of the new funding arrangements on school budgets. "We remain acutely disappointed that Government have not progressed their fair funding proposals within the education reforms. The impact of not having honoured this commitment leaves Cambridgeshire as one of the lowest funded authorities in the country. The current funding changes have been rushed and pay insufficient regard to the needs of Cambridgeshire's schools and pupils.

"We will be working with our schools to help them lessen the impact of any potential drop in funding, and to this end have issued draft budgets three months earlier than usual. But we will continue to call on the Government to bring forward their fair funding proposals as soon as possible, to enable all children to have an equal and fair start in life," he said.

LOCAL PEOPLE TO HAVE THEIR SAY ON HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENTS

Cambridgeshire County Council is again giving local communities a chance to have a real voice in deciding on highways improvements in their area. The Council is inviting communities to bid for funding which has been made available for the next financial year, and parish councils, community and residents groups and charities are all eligible to bid. Successful projects will be those providing highway improvements that benefit the local community. For example, better signing and road markings, pedestrian improvements, parking controls or dropped kerbs. Applicants can seek up to £10,000 as a County Council contribution to their scheme with an expectation that they will provide 10% or more of the overall cost. The County Council is also offering loan facilities for those who wish to spread their contribution over 2 or 3 years.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said: "We know that local people know local needs, so we are giving communities a real say about what goes on in their area. This funding presents a real opportunity for them to put forward ideas for improvements to the highway network that will benefit everyone in their area and to work in partnership with the county council - it's localism in action."

Bidders have until December 21 to submit details of their scheme and an application form is available online at:
www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/transport/localism/Minor+works+funding+opportunities.htm

SUPPORT AVAILABLE DURING ALCOHOL AWARENESS WEEK

Agencies across Cambridgeshire have joined forces to raise awareness of the risks of excessive drinking and to promote the help and support available. Cambridgeshire's Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) is working with Cambridgeshire Police, hospitals, prisons and treatment services to raise awareness during the recent national Alcohol Awareness Week. It's Time to Talk about Drinking is Alcohol Concern's theme for this year's campaign, which aims to start up conversations about the health risks, social problems, stigmas and taboos associated with alcohol.

Events that took place across the county included:

* A month long health campaign being run by pharmacies across Cambridgeshire to raise awareness about the risks of excessive drinking
* Leaflets raising awareness about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) have been delivered to GP Surgeries.
* Raising awareness with parents regarding drinking limits in Children Centres.
* An open day was held at Addaction Alcohol Treatment St Neots site, including an acupuncture taster session, quiz, service user stories and input and refreshments
* Recovery awards to congratulate those in treatment who have made a real achievement in their own recovery, or for those who have supported an individual in their recovery
* Leaflets and posters delivered to GP surgeries, pharmacies, police stations and libraries throughout Cambridgeshire
* Brief Intervention Training for Richmond Fellowship Staff (a service that supports people with mental health problems), befrienders and volunteers concluding with discussion group based on the theme It's Time to Talk about Drinking for service users

CASUS, the Young People's substance misuse service, focused on educating young people of the dangers of irresponsible drinking and the embarrassing problems it can create. CASUS put together a range of downloadable teaching resources for people working with young people and sending out displays to schools, educational units and young person focused services in Cambridgeshire.

Addenbrooke's Hospital's emergency department said: "Although there have been slight reductions in the level of alcohol related attendances and admissions over the last five years, too many people are drinking too much alcohol. One of the problems is that this alcohol-related damage is often severe before it shows itself, so people do not realise they are being affected. Try to have at least a couple of days every week without drinking alcohol. If you are concerned about your drinking or think you might have an alcohol problem, discuss this with your doctor."

Cambridgeshire Constabulary said: "Beyond the obvious health related risks, excessive alcohol consumption or binge drinking can also have huge social and personal implications. Irresponsible alcohol consumption or binge drinking can alter how people act and can be a significant factor influencing involvement in alcohol related crime and disorder. Cambridge has a vibrant, diverse and healthy city centre and associated night time economy. It is vital that people using the city centre avoid binge drinking and therefore act and drink responsibly so to ensure the city centre remains a safe and enjoyable place for people to work and visit."

Addaction is the local adult alcohol treatment and support service. They can be contacted on 01223 723069, 01480 424289, 01945 469035 or 08000 213064 orhttp://www.addaction.org.uk www.addaction.org.uk

CASUS is the local service for under-18s, or concerned parents of under-18s and can be contacted on 01223 214614 or 01480 415278 or at http://www.casus.cpft.nhs.uk

BUY WITH CONFIDENCE - NOT ON THE DOORSTEP!

The County Council's approved trader scheme is backing last month's National Consumer Week and urging people not to buy on the doorstep. Buy With Confidence - developed by Trading Standards - provides consumers with a list of bone-fide contractors who will do a good job at a reasonable price and help them to avoid 'rogue traders' who often cold call their victims. The scheme provides Cambridgeshire residents with a credible alternative with an online database of local approved businesses which are more than happy to discuss work with possible clients with no high pressure sales tactics.

To find a Buy With Confidence member:

* Go to www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk
* Call the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 08454 040506
* Or call in at you local library where staff can look up traders

Before agreeing to any work, customers should always ensure they have spoken to two or three traders to satisfy themselves that the work is necessary and always get prices from more than one company.

Any business which is interested in joining the BWC list can get further information and an application form at
www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk or call Cambridgeshire Direct on 03450 455206.

Satisfied customers can also recommend contractors to the scheme by e-mail at: bwc@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or by calling the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 08454 040506.

17 YEARS FOR ROGUE TRADERS WHO RIPPED OFF ELDERLY / VULNERABLE VICTIMS

Five rogue traders who preyed on elderly and vulnerable people in and around Cambridgeshire have been sentenced to more than 17 years in prison. At Cambridge Crown Court, Joseph Henry Lee, the ringleader of the gang, was sentenced to seven years after pleading guilty to conspiracy to defraud and money laundering offences. Accomplices James William Forrest, Joseph Bellman Jonathan Lee, Andrew Hodson and Owen Sexton, received sentences of between seven months and five and a half years after admitting conspiracy to defraud and money laundering offences.

The sentencing was the culmination of a two year investigation into rogue trading activity conducted by Cambridgeshire County Council's Trading Standards service and the Police after complaints were first received in summer 2010. The gang ripped off over one hundred customers, some of whom handed over their life savings as grossly-inflated payment for poor quality and often unnecessary work the conmen undertook.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said: "We welcome the sentences imposed. Not only did these people rip off their victims but they have also caused a considerable amount of harm and distress to them too. Some victims paid several thousands of pounds for work that didn't even need doing. These criminals are the lowest of the low, often preying on the most vulnerable members of society to extort huge financial sums."

The money launderers cashed cheques paid by rogue trading victims, taking a cut of typically ten per cent, to avoid alerting banks to the large sums the rogues were bringing in from their illegal activities. Financial Investigators are now working to determine the financial benefit gained from the criminal activity, thought to be in the region of £700,000, and the next step is to seek compensation for the victims.

If you think that you, a friend, relative or neighbour has been a victim of a rogue trader, please contact Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 0845 4040506.

NEW SERVICE SET TO BE THE TICKET FOR COMMUNITY DESIGNED BUS ROUTE

The tender is out for the first community designed bus service that will be funded by the Cambridgeshire Future Transport programme. The Cambridgeshire Future Transport scheme will see £1.5 million per year invested in transport services across the county which are designed by the community to meet their needs. Members of the community have worked with Cambridgeshire County Council to design a service that best meets their needs and will help reduce social isolation.

It will link Sawston, Hinxton, Pampisford, Heathfield, Whittlesford, the Park and Ride at Babraham and Whittlesford Station. This will help residents get to work, education, training and health services, such as the Sawston Medical Centre, as well as shopping and leisure facilities. The new bus service for the Whittlesford area will not only be an improvement on the old one, linking to more places and being more regular but will save the Council tens of thousands of pounds. The service will run on a loop of every one hour and 15 minutes - the current service runs every two hours.

Cambridgeshire County Councillor Tony Orgee, Cabinet Member for Community Infrastructure, said: "This service has truly been designed by the community to most meet their needs and reduce isolation in rural areas. The solution emerged from work we did with a local working group which included local members, users, the district and operators and I would like to thank them for all their help. Not only is the new service an improvement, linking to services that the Citi7 didn't but it also runs at more regular times than the current service. But it also costs less. This is part of the Council commitment to plan our services around the needs of the communities we serve."

TEAM SECURE FUNDING FOR GREAT WAR COMMEMORATION PROJECT

The European Commission has awarded funding to Cambridgeshire County Council to take part in a project to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Great War in 2014. 'The Great War - Between the Lines' project will work with partners in the UK, Northern France and Belgium to develop a range of activities, events and materials designed to build on the feeling of remembrance felt by the public. It aims to enhance the understanding of the heritage of the Great War, and its legacy, in the build up to the commemoration of the centenary of the outbreak of the conflict.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said "The Great War - Between the Lines project comes at exactly the right time in the preparations for the 2014 commemoration. It follows on from the announcement of Government funding to support schoolchildren learn about the sacrifices made 100 years ago for us all. This project will allow us in Cambridgeshire to ensure that the legacy of 2014 is lasting, meaningful and understood by even our youngest citizens."

MUSICIANS WANTED WITH A STRING TO THEIR BOW

An appeal has been launched to recruit more string players to the Cambridgeshire County Youth Orchestra. The orchestra wants young string players at grade 6 or 7 or equivalent or above to join them for the 2012-13 season. The repertoire for that and the 2013-14 season includes Holst's The Planets, Walk to the Paradise Garden by Delius, Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony, Arnold's Cornish Dances and the Academic Festival Overture by Brahms. Rehearsals and concerts are held at the end of the Christmas and Easter holidays so college students can take part. Wind and brass players of grade 7 and above and strings and percussionists of grade 6 and above may also apply.

Anyone interested should phone Cambridgeshire Music on 01480 373500.
Application forms can be downloaded from:
http://www.cambridgeshiremusic.org/musicians-zone/county-academy-ensembles/

BUSWAY SCOOPS NATIONAL TRANSPORT AWARD AS MOST INNOVATIVE PROJECT

Cambridgeshire's Busway scooped a top national award for the most innovative transport project at the National Transport Awards in London. The event was attended by Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin and recognises excellence in transport.

Judges heard how the Busway had beaten all expectations and had carried more than 2.5 million journeys within the first year of opening - well beyond its business case. The Busway helps boost the local economy as it links existing centres of population, education, training and employment. It is also already in place to support the transport needs of residents in the 25,000 new homes and the employees of the expected 15,000 new jobs that are being delivered along the areas it serves.

The Busway also uses a range of technological innovations including smartcard ticketing, real time bus information, free wi-fi on board buses and smart phone technology so passengers can see in real time the next service due at their local stop. There are a number of environmental innovations too including creating 13 hectares of new natural habitat in 16 separate areas. The Busway used recycled materials where possible including more than 1.7 million shredded tyres to use as drainage which normally cannot be landfilled.

Judges heard how more than 85 per cent of vehicles on the Busway run on 100 per cent bio-fuel which produces up to 80 per cent less carbon emissions. Busway also links in with other transport projects to make it easier for people to access services and employment. The use of the maintenance track for cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders has also been very successful.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "This national award is recognition of just how successful the Busway is, especially as it was being compared with flagship projects such as the Heathrow pods and Emirates Airline in London. The sheer fact we are so ahead of the business case and that bus operators put on extra services just weeks into the start of the Busway shows just how popular it is. The Busway is important in helping to reduce congestion and boost the local economy. With thousands of cyclists using the maintenance track it also provides a major boost to people getting on their bike.

“The system not only links in with areas of education, jobs and public services but is in place ready for new developments. This means residents are encouraged to look at other options than the car to travel around. This also helps brings jobs to Cambridgeshire as employers look at places to expand or base their business. It is part of an overall strategy by the County Council to improve transport and therefore improve health and employment across Cambridgeshire."

OFFICIAL OPENING OF NEW TRINITY SCHOOL

County Council Chairman John Powley was the guest of honour when he officially opened the new Trinity School at the Foxton site in Station Road. Trinity School is a community special school formed by the merger of three previous learner centres. It has three bases - at Foxton, Hartford and Wisbech. The school serves children with statements of special needs, specifically for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

As a multi-site school it is able to accept pupils into any of the three sites across the county. Bringing the learning centres together means that children have access to a much wider curriculum; a broader range of specialist staff and most importantly are part of a school environment. Each site has its own distinctive personality and curriculum but works under a shared ethos and set of core values. The opening ceremony on 25 October will start with a short presentation by headteacher Jim Simon and the chair of governors.

COUNCIL TEAME SECURE EROPEAN FUNDING FOR EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT PROJECT

European funding has been secured by teams at Cambridgeshire County Council for an employment support project. The IMPRESS project (Innovative & Meaningful Post Recruitment Employment Support Services) is funded by the Interreg 4a 'Channel' programme and will work with 10 partners in the UK and France, sharing knowledge to offer support and guidance to long-term unemployed people who have gained employment and face barriers to maintaining it.

IMPRESS will engage with employers to improve staff retention, provide better skills opportunities, develop practical approaches to improve the performance and retention of individuals at work and create strategies for certain sectors to understand what works best for both employers and employees. The project will be delivered across Cambridgeshire by teams from Library Learning Services and the Adult Careers Service.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said 'We believe that our involvement in the IMPRESS project will help us to take the Council's priorities further by moving away from what is often a focus on unemployment and remedial action into something longer-demand for the benefit of individual employees, sustainable employment and growth'.

IMPRESS is funded until the end of 2014 by the European Commission through its Interreg 4a 'Channel' cross border funding stream, funding intended to encourage collaboration across the English Channel with Northern France.

MILLIONS OF FAMILY RECORDS SAFELY MOVED

A major project to transfer around two million family records to a new online system, and continue to make them freely available, has been completed in Cambridgeshire. The project means the information is now online on a much easier to use and more reliable system. It has been made possible thanks to a partnership agreement between Cambridgeshire County Council Registration Service and the Cambridgeshire Family History Society which has led to a new system being developed. This ensures continued access to the several million entries already online, and will now allow work to continue to complete the project.

Customers from around the world are able to search birth, marriage and death entries that have been recorded across Cambridgeshire from 1837 to the current decade, although it is a work in progress. The free search facility, accessible through the County Council's website at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/community/bmd/certificate, allows people to find details about their family tree and order certificates easily. It also allows people to apply for more recent entries online and apply for copies of their own family's records.

Cambridgeshire County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "This has been a major project which ensures that index details can continue to be freely available at the click of a mouse. It spans nearly 200 years of history in Cambridgeshire. The project is part of the County Council's commitment to make as much information as available as it can, as well as using the internet to help everyone access services and keep costs down. Customers can not only use CAMDEX to search their family history but also order and pay for certificates."

Terry Garner, Chairman of Cambridgeshire Family History Society (who have numerous resources available on their website at www.cfhs.org.uk) , said: "Volunteers of various local Family History Societies have worked, and will continue to work, with Cambridgeshire County Council tirelessly over the past 10 years to make this valuable resource available to people around the world. We are pleased that a partnership approach has secured easy access to this index data for many years to come"

NEW 'NO COLD CALLING ZONES' TO FREEZE OUT ROGUE TRADERS

Cambridgeshire Trading Standards officers have been working with local people to set up three new 'no cold calling' zones designed to protect residents from rogue traders. No Cold Calling Zones were first set up in St Ives in 2002 followed by 114 other zones covering 146 roads throughout Cambridgeshire. Now the scheme is being rolled out to three further streets, Anchor Court and Fleet Close in Littleport and Holme Close in Little Downham.

Residents are offered help and advice and provided with an information pack which enables them to have the confidence to say no to any cold callers who knock at their door and to warn rogue traders that they are not welcome. Window stickers and street signs advertise where no cold calling zones are in operation. Nationally, more than 10,000 complaints are made about cold calling doorstep traders every year.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "No Cold Calling Zones have proved very effective in areas where vulnerable people live - such as sheltered accommodation or developments for older or disabled people. They are introduced with the full-cooperation of local residents and are a good way of helping to support the community and protect them from unscrupulous traders or salespeople who may be seeking to exploit or steal from them."

Further information on No Cold Calling Zones is available from Cambridgeshire Trading Standards on 0345 404 0506.

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